

Message Text

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 12068

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY, JO, PLO, XF

SUBJECT: KING HUSSEIN'S VIEWS ON LEBANON

REF AMMAN'S 6489 (NOTAL)

1. REFTEL IS ENCOURAGING IN THAT KING'S DESCRIPTION OF THE LEBANESE SITUATION IS ABOUT AS ACCURATE AND BALANCED AS WE HAVE SEEN IN SOME TIME. WE CAN FIND NOTHING TO CHALLENGE SERIOUSLY, AND OUR COMMENTS BELOW, PARAGRAPH BY PARAGRAPH, ARE BASICALLY NIT-PICKS OR ADDITIONAL POINTS SUPPORTING KING'S THESIS:

2. PARA 3. BEGINNING OF FIGHTING IN ZAHLE WAS AS TRAGIC AS THAT OF TRIPOLI IN THAT IT AROSE OUT OF AN ARGUMENT OVER A PINBALL MACHINE. WE HAVE NO PROOF THAT THE IRAQIS WERE MORE ACTIVE IN TRIPOLI THAN ELSEWHERE IN LEBANON AS SYRIANS ALLEGE. THEY HAVE

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APPEARED TO BE PLAYING A SECONDARY ROLE BEHIND THE SCENES, THOUGH SYRIANS (AND JORDANIANS) MAY BE

ESPECIALLY SENSITIVE TO (AND THEREFORE EXAGGERATE) ANYTHING IRAQIS DO IN LEBANON. AN INTERESTING POINT IS THAT IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ONCE TRIPOLI INSECURITY THREATENED REFINERY, IRAQIS HASTENED TO CALL OFF THE DOGS.

3. PARA 4. BELIEVE DESCRIPTION OF FRANGIE IS ACCURATE. WE HAD NOT REPEAT NOT HEARD UNTIL KHADDAM'S VISIT OF A DRINKING PROBLEM, AND ALL WE KNEW WAS THAT HE APPEARED TRULY OVERCOME BY MAGNITUDE OF PROBLEMS. I THINK SYRIANS ARE A BIT HARD ON KARAME. HIS FUNCTIONING CERTAINLY HAS NOT ALWAYS GOTTEN THE DESIRED RESULTS, BUT HE WAS AT LEAST TRYING AND DOING WHAT HE COULD. HE REPRESENTS LAST OPTION IN CONCEIVABLE NATIONAL "CONCILIATION" GOVERNMENTS. IF HE WENT, THERE IS NO OBVIOUS CANDIDATE TO TAKE HIS PLACE.

4. CHAMOUN CONTINUES TO BE A FASCINATING INDIVIDUAL. IT SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN THAT HIS PRIVATE BUSINESS ACTIVITIES KICKED OFF THE CURRENT LEBANESE PROBLEMS IN SIDON WHERE HE LAUNCHED A MONOPOLISTIC THOUGH EFFICIENT FISHING COMPANY. HE HAS PLAYED HIS CARDS WITH GREAT ASTUTENESS AND IS UNQUESTIONABLY THESE DAYS AMONG THE FEW LEBANESE LEADERS WORTHY OF THAT DEFINITION. UNFORTUNATELY, CHAMOUN IS NOT AS YOUNG AS HE USED TO BE AND AT TIMES WE HAVE FOUND HIM SHOWING SIGNS OF SENILITY. FORTUNATELY, HOWEVER, SUCH OCCASIONS ARE RARE AND HE HAS THE ACTIVE ASSISTANCE OF HIS TWO RELATIVELY ABLE SONS. INDEED THE PACE AT WHICH HE HAS BEEN GOING SINCE HE BECAME MINISTER OF INTERIOR WOULD EXHAUST MANY YOUNGER MEN. THE OTHER PROBLEM I HAVE WITH CHAMOUN IS THAT AS FAR AS SOCIAL LEGISLATION IS CONCERNED, HE HAS NO INTEREST IN SUCH DEVELOPMENTS AND IS ULTRA-CONSERVATIVE ON SUCH ISSUES.

5. I FIND IMPRESSION THAT GEMAYEL IS RUNNING SCARED FASCINATING. IF TRUE, IT IS GOOD NEWS, FOR I HAVE BEEN UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY ASTUTE TO REALIZE THE TRAGEDY THAT HE IS FORSING UPON THE CHRISTIANS IN THIS COUNTRY. I AM

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DELIGHTED WITH THE PRAISE FOR THE PATRIARCH WHOM I TOO HOLD IN HIGH ESTEEM AS A LIBERAL, MODERATE AND THOUGHTFUL MAN -- THOUGH ONE WHOSE WEIGHT HAS NOT YET BEEN FELT VERY HEAVILY IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS.

6. PARA 5: I HOPE SYRIAN INCLINATION TO PULL OUT IF THEIR CURRENT MEDIATORY EFFORTS DO NOT SUCCEED WILL NOT MATERIALIZE. SHOULD CURRENT EFFORTS FAIL, I HOPE KING WILL ENDEAVOR PERSUADE SYRIA TO CONTINUE.

7. PARA 7: IT IS MOST REASSURING. WE ARE HAPPY TO NOTE THAT KING AGREED WITH AMBASSADOR PICKERING'S OBSERVATIONS RE ISRAELI RESTRAINT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, WHICH IS A POINT THAT WE TOO HAVE BEEN TRYING TO EMPHASIZE TO LEBANESE FRIENDS.

8. PARA 8: I CANNOT AGREE MORE WITH KING'S VIEWS ON WHAT SHOULD BE DONE NOW. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL REFORM ARE VITAL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ARMY IS ESSENTIAL. I WOULD HAVE NO QUARREL SHOULD CLOSE RELATIONSHIP DEVELOP WITH SYRIA, JORDAN AND LEBANON, FOR THIS WOULD BE IN MY VIEW A FACTOR FOR STABILITY. I DOUBT THAT MANY LEBANESE WOULD ACTIVELY SEEK SUCH A RELATIONSHIP BUT MANY WOULD WISH IT WELL. SYRIA APPEARS EVEN TO MANY CHRISTIANS AS THE ONLY POWER CAPABLE OF MODERATING PALESTINIAN FORCES AND KEEPING THEM OUT OF THE BATTLE IN; SUPPORT OF EXTREMIST LEBANESE MOSLEMS. WERE IT NOT FOR THE THREAT OF THE MAIN-LINE FEDAYEEN, WE THINK CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD SYRIA WOULD BE DIFFERENT. LET'S FACE IT: MANY LEBANESE, EVEN MOSLEMS, SILENTLY WISH THAT THE GOL COULD HAVE DONE IN SPRING 1973 WHAT HUSSEIN DID IN SEPTEMBER 1970. GODLEY

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